

The Body of Chinese Medicine and Contemporary Practice

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Studies
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Certificate

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Mary Garvey

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Contents

Contents	i
Tables and Diagrams	iii
Abstract.....	iv
 Introduction: Background to the Study	1
The story so far	5
TCM in the West	11
 Chapter One: The Research	13
Science, integration, and the medical body	14
Research purpose and method	21
 Chapter Two: The Tradition	28
The roots of the tree.....	30
Terms and concepts	40
Summary	49
 Chapter Three: The Body	51
The body as microcosm	53
Potentials and manifestations	57
The story of Chinese anatomy	60
Embodiment.....	65
Summary	69
 Chapter Four: Coursing and Discharge.....	72
Visceral manifestations theory	75
The liver: the ‘learned general’, the <i>zang</i> of wood, the reverting <i>yin</i>	80
Terms and clinical applications	84
Summary	91

Chapter Five: Spaces and Textures	94
The <i>sanjiao</i> : the ‘water administration official’, the <i>fu</i> of fire, the lesser <i>yang</i>	96
Form and no form	100
The body surface and interior.....	108
Disorder and therapy.....	112
Summary	117
 Chapter Six: Emotions and Desires	120
Physiological fire	122
The pericardium and lifegate.....	126
The minister fire	132
Function and dysfunction	137
Summary	144
 Chapter Seven: The Mind	147
Ancestors, instincts, awareness	150
Human mentality	155
The embodied self	161
Summary	166
 Chapter Eight: Concluding Remarks	170
The Chinese medical body.....	172
Chinese medicine in contemporary English speaking contexts	176
 Appendix A: Glossary of Chinese terms, texts and names	181
Appendix B: Abbreviations	208
Appendix C: China’s dynasties and relevant medical texts, authors and physicians.....	209
References	212

Tables and Diagrams

Tables 2.1: Numerical models a, b and c.....	35
Tables 2.1: Numerical models d and e	36
Table 2.2: Terms and translations.....	42
Table 3.1: the <i>zangfu</i> 's <i>yin–yang</i> and five phase correspondences	55
Diagram 3.1: Five phases — ‘engendering’ and ‘checking’ cycles.....	56
Figure 3.1: Images believed to be derived from the dissections in 1045	62
Figure 3.2: Wang Qingren’s views of the internal organs.....	63
Table 5.1 The five <i>zang</i> and six <i>fu</i> , and the miscellaneous <i>fu</i>	98
Diagram 5.1 The movement of <i>qi</i> through the channels	101
Table 5.2: Five phase <i>zang</i> and body tissue correspondences.....	102
Table 5.3: The six channels	109
Table 6.1: Timeline for minister fire associations	124
Table 6.2: The five phases and twelve channels, and <i>sanjiao</i> associations	128
Table 6.3: The five circulatory phases and six seasonal influences	133
Table 6.4: The kidneys as the basis of water and fire	134
Table 7.1: Five phase correspondences	154

Abstract

Chinese medicine is changing rapidly in response to scientific advances and technologies, and the biomedicalisation of its traditional practices has become a global trend. Australia seems likely to follow this trend for many reasons, not the least of which is a lack of access to traditional sources. The thesis argues that, to the extent that biomedicalisation by-passes Chinese medicine's traditional concepts and frameworks, it disrupts diagnostic reasoning and alters the clinician's therapeutic options. The argument assumes that Chinese medicine's traditional conceptions are the basis of its therapeutic reasoning and decision making, that traditional conceptions guide successful clinical practice, and that contemporary clinicians understand them.

However, the odds against today's English speaking clinicians understanding the Chinese medical tradition are high. Access to premodern primary sources is problematic for non-Chinese speakers, and Chinese medicine texts in English have removed the historical and cultural contexts and meanings of traditional concepts to 'scientise' their content. Conversely, historical and anthropological research into Chinese medicine investigates precisely this kind of contextual information, but without reference to its clinical relevance.

Rather than preserve the distinction between academic and clinical research, the thesis adopts a multidisciplinary approach to some of the issues facing Chinese medicine in Australia and the West. The significance of the study is threefold. First, it uses a broad range of English-language research and scholarship to re-imagine the traditional Chinese medical body. Second, its restoration of traditional perspectives draws out the internal intelligibility of premodern concepts and methods, and their relevance for contemporary clinical decision-making. Finally, its multidisciplinary and synthetic approach connects the interests of academic scholarship and clinical practice, and reinstates the traditional connections between Chinese medicine's conceptual frameworks and its clinical methods.

The thesis argues that it is possible for contemporary Westerners to maintain Chinese medicine's intelligibility as a system of medical practice. The decision to do so requires the careful restoration of traditional terms and concepts, and of the

medical gaze that privileges the living body's functional systems and activities. The restoration and re-imagining of Chinese medicine's traditional perspectives and methods connects contemporary Chinese medicine students and professionals to the complexity of this distinctive medical system. Our ability to recognise and understand the traditional Chinese medical body has ramifications for guiding diagnosis and therapeutic decisions, and fundamentally changes the clinical encounter.

While the thesis focuses on the reception and practice of Chinese medicine in contemporary Australia, I hope the issues and topics discussed will prove relevant for English speaking Chinese medicine professionals, educators, students and users in other parts of the world. Many of the topics and materials will be of interest to healthcare providers and users generally, and to anyone with an interest in socio-cultural, philosophical and clinical constructions of the body, health, illness and medical practice.